

The raw food movement gains ground in Richmond.

BY NATALIE MESNARD

Cooking



Is Overrated

on raw diets. Once she started eating raw, she says, the results were immediate. "My digestion is better, I sleep better, my skin's better and I have more energy," Farley says. "Raw food just seems to work for me."

Let's face it, the omnivore's dilemma — deciding how, what, where and when to eat — can be a daily trial. In a world of dietary uncertainty, a growing number of advocates claim numerous benefits from eating food in its natural state. These raw foodists are vegetarians or vegans who eat a diet composed primarily of uncooked vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds. They claim weight-loss, improved digestion, increased energy and anti-cancer properties as just a few of the reasons to go raw. With Richmond's abundance of fresh produce and a few basic recipes, making the switch can be easier than it seems. Can a raw food diet work for you? It's not for everyone, but for some — including these working women — the results are intriguing.

Health information consultant Marina Kharitonova started eating raw when she was a senior in college. "I was into whole foods and organic stuff," Kharitonova says. Raw foods were "just the next step." She was impressed when her stepfather successfully used a raw food and juice diet to treat his health issues, and she picked up the book "Raw: The Uncook Book" by Juliano Brotman, a celebrity chef who runs an all-raw restaurant in California. Soon she was eating a diet composed of at least 90 percent raw foods, and says she was healthier than she'd ever been. She started a blog to show off photos of her meals and keep track of recipes, and became an Internet celebrity in the world of Russian raw food, appearing in Russian magazines and writing articles on her culinary lifestyle.

Deborah Farley, an acupuncturist and holistic health coach, has also made raw food a big part of her life. She not only eats almost all raw, but also was recently certified as a raw and living food chef and teacher. She now offers courses on raw foods through her holistic health practice. (For information, visit Farley's website at debifarley.com). Farley's raw food lifestyle started when she moved to Richmond. Though she'd known about raw food for some time, she didn't try eating raw until she joined a community-supported agriculture co-op in Richmond and met other members who were

Ready to go raw?

➤ Kharitonova recommends starting with breakfast and lunch. "Perfect five recipes you know you can make really quickly," she says. "I can always 'cook' something in 15 minutes." Farley recommends raw food meet-up groups and potlucks. Go to meetup.com to find the organization.

➤ Farley suggests starting with green smoothies — dense, nutritious blends that incorporate leafy greens such as spinach or kale, as well as fruits — and salads.

➤ Fancy equipment is helpful but unnecessary. A high-quality blender is a good place to start — most serious raw foodists choose the expensive but nearly indestructible Vitamix blender. Some raw devotees also use juicers, substituting fruit and vegetable juice for some meals, and dehydrators, which can greatly expand the raw food repertoire with fruit leathers, raw crackers, and countless dried fruits and vegetables.

➤ Both women agree that one of the best aspects of eating raw in Richmond is its thriving farmers' market scene and diverse selection of co-ops. A visit to a farmers' market can provide quick inspiration for raw meals, and co-ops look for new members in the fall and winter months.

Book List

"Raw: The Uncook Book: New Vegetarian Food for Life"

by Juliano Brotman and Erika Lenkert
REGAN BOOKS, 1999

"12 Steps to Raw Foods: How to End Your Dependency on Cooked Food"

by Victoria Boutenko and Gabriel Cousens
NORTH ATLANTIC BOOKS, 2007

"Green for Life"

by Victoria Boutenko
RAW FAMILY PUBLISHING, 2005

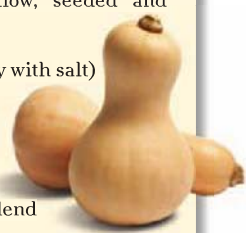
"The Raw Food Detox Diet: The Five-Step Plan for Vibrant Health and Maximum Weight Loss"

by Natalia Rose
HARPER PAPERBACKS, 2006

Marina's Butternut Squash Soup

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup butternut squash, cubed
- 1 medium sweet pepper, red or yellow, seeded and chopped
- 2 tablespoons of pine nuts
- 3 tablespoons of sun dried tomatoes (dry with salt)
- ¼ of small white yellow onion
- 1 tablespoon of sage, fresh or dry
- 1 teaspoon of rosemary, fresh or dry
- ½ teaspoon mild curry powder
- ¼ teaspoon of sea salt
- ½ to 1 cup of warm water, as needed to blend



DIRECTIONS: Place everything in the blender and blend until smooth. Garnish with fresh herbs or pomegranate seeds.



Deborah Farley teaches how to "cook" raw foods.

Marina Kharitonova (above right) says a raw foods diet has improved her health.

PHOTOS BY SCOTT ELMQUIST